

GHOST GIRLS

VOL. 1

BODY

BODY



EDITED BY:
AUTUMN DURAND
@AUTUMNROSEDURAND
&
MEL TANG
@MT.WRITES

ILLUSTRATION BY:
JADE ZHANG
@DAIKONBABY

Letter from the Editor

I came up with the theme *Body* when a cataclysm of pandemic, post-grad, lost 20-something anxiety came crashing down on me and I found myself feeling unmoored by my own life. Desperate to distract myself, I did what I often do when I need to escape: I left my body lying on my bedroom floor and I dissolved into stories, reading as many books as I could get my hands on and pushing my mind into other people's worlds. For a little while, it worked. But the pandemic raged on, and I couldn't stop thinking about the bodies of my loved ones—wishing they were safe, wishing I could hold them—and my own body and how I can't seem to let go of a list of grievances I hold against her, even as she buoyed me through the turmoil of 2020. It was that liminal space, trapped in my bedroom, coming back to my body even though it hurt, that led me to *Ghost Girls*.

My mom asked me, “Why is it called *Ghost Girls*? What does that mean?” and I didn't have an answer. Now, as I am pouring over the final edits, *Body* tangible and real and fully formed, I realize that I wanted to carve out a small space for the writers and artists who may not fit anywhere else, those of us who feel, on our worst days, that you might be able to pass right through us. And by some extraordinary stroke of luck, I found myself compiling some of the most poignant and beautiful pieces I have ever read and seen, told from perspectives that explore the ways our bodies hold our grief and trauma and fear and anger, but also the ways they hold desire; new, undiscovered facets of ourselves and old childhood memories; love.

I still struggle with disembodiment, often feeling like I am passively living as I wait for the world to change, my body to change, wait for the idealized versions of myself to somehow appear in the flesh and my dream life to fall perfectly into place. But I have always found solace in other people's words and watching the roadmap of *Body*—filled with the details and stories and histories of the ways our bodies carry us as we move through the world—take shape has brought me more comfort and hope than I can express. Thank you to all 17 of our contributors for voicing what I didn't even know I needed to hear and for trusting Mel and I with your work. I didn't read a single piece without crying.

So, dear reader, I cannot thank you enough for supporting *Ghost Girls*. I hope that you, like me, are haunted and charmed by *Body* in equal measure.

Yours,

Autumn Durand
Editor of *Ghost Girls*

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metamorphosis
by Kayla



half and half

by Mel Tang

my nose freckles in
the sun but i never
burn the way my
mom does. my guma used
to shake her head when i'd show
up to her house brown
hair brown eyes
brown skin—aiya, so
dark, she would say. one time i
overheard her and my dad
arguing in rapid
cantonese. why so
dark. they were
at the beach. beach,
rice field, what difference does
it make. when i stayed inside
the next summer, my skin
paled to a coffee creamer
white. just like mom. guma
never commented on my
appearance after that, just shuffled
me to the backyard with my
cousins and told us to keep
to the shade. the truth is i don't
think i have ever looked like
i was supposed to—too
white to be

chinese, too
asian to be
white—my cousins
have chinese names i can't
pronounce and english
names to make it
easier, and my aunties compliment
the shape and shade
of my eyes.
what are you, anyway,
my coworker asks me.
no offense.
i don't know, i want to say.
english is the only language
i've ever spoken but my
aunt's cantonese rings
in my ears every time i stay
outside too long in june. are
people only ever what
they look like? i tell my coworker i'm
half chinese
and he tells me he
can see it.
i wonder if
he's lying.

power within
by Caitlin Lamb



The Anatomy of Jesus

by Mbira

There was a skeleton below,
I stood on the left with a halo
Running my fingers along
Cracks in the bone
I've never seen this before,
but God has
God has.
Maybe this is the holy spirit?
Was the skeleton the Father or Son?
I can't tell, they took the skeleton and drowned it in milk
Milk whiter than any angel
The skeleton's creator never separated from its creation
Mary loves with her mind
And we sit in church and pick apart bones
Like a Biology lesson.

Monster

by Sam Kennelly

There was a time when the only yearning I had towards my body was the desire to be a dragon. I would stare into the sky, surrounded by the sounds of children, and I'd imagine wings breaking through the skin of my shoulder blades, letting me fly away from the laughter in my ears. I'd pretend to feel scales creep from under my skin, forming a natural armor that would protect me from any physical harm. I'd feel my fingers lengthen, sharp talons growing from the nails, ready to scythe any that dare threaten me.

As I grow older, my imagination continues to attach itself to my body. I fantasize about a version of myself that towers over the masses, with large curling horns, and sharp, cat-like teeth. Snakes crown my head and beetles that leave blisters in their wake crawl upon my skin. Blood and pus seep from septic wounds that cause even the most seasoned doctors to recoil. A beast, a demon, a lost cause. I imagine the fear I'd strike, and I **smile**. Gone is my soft face. Forgotten are my plump lips. I become a fairytale monster, and **I like it**.

My body is soft. It's pink, rosy from the blood that pumps through my veins. I blush easily. My hands and feet are dainty. My neck aches from the upright position it takes whenever I talk with anyone over the age of seven. I look like a **girl**. A woman. I look like, if I got in a fight with a particularly stubborn goose, I'd lose.

Since I was a child, I've always looked at bodies with fascination. I bought myself a pair of binoculars so I could watch the movements

of the creatures of the earth without being a total creeper. I failed to see at the time that the binoculars made it worse, but the point stands. Bodies were, and still are, **fucking radical**. I admire how a squirrel leaps up trees, seeming to defy gravity. I watch the crows bob their heads as they walk.

I watch the women. I watch their fat shift across their muscles as they twist. I see them laugh, run, dance, and I desire them. Women are **delightful**.

I look like a woman. So I must ask myself, am I not delightful? Am I not radiant? Is the fat slumped across my belly, my breasts, my arms... is that not attractive? Why must I imagine myself as a beast on the prowl to be happy with the space I fill?

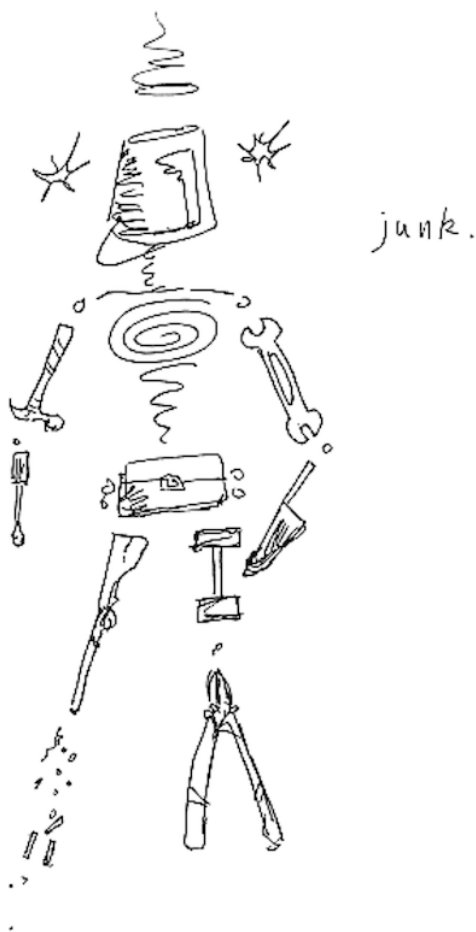
My trans body is already an act of defiance. It's already one that awards me with the unfortunate privilege to see people's backs as they run further and further away. It's already one that people send knights after, missionaries that are set on exorcising the evil that is me. My body is mine. But I don't fit.

At least if I had the wings, the teeth, the armor... maybe then I'd finally feel strong enough to control my own narrative. Maybe then the running wouldn't hurt so much. If I am a monster in flesh alone, I finally am free of my own undoing.



junk

by Sarah Osterhouse



previous page:

Boy Body

by Alex Kandarian

Communion

by Brianna Tang

Bright red berries
shining and round
fell and landed in my basket.
My small stomach went hungry
as I was told
don't eat them: they're poison.

Hymns reverberate through
the creaking floorboards, muffled
as we do laundry
side by heated side
in a capsuled, immortal basement.
We don't speak; the forbidden brush
of our elbows is
too much for me, but
I remember the psalms later,
draping them along the soft pale lattice of
your twined fingers as the sun sets—
brilliant, orange,
against your skin—
on the last day of my denial,
cheek by turned cheek,
I choke down unutterable praise:
Your eyes are so blue.

Heat bakes upon my head,
red sands stretching for miles

around the van, on a mission trip,
to save Sodom.

Waiting for gas, it begins to
rain; cold—freezing,
dripping through my long hair,
soaking now, under the weight of
my own hatred for its
clinging strands.

My shirt's too tight, suctioning itself to my
breasts and warping a vacuum
of my lungs. I can't breathe, aware of each
drop on me, exposing what's mine, not me.
I am not my own,
body
forced to fit flesh to suit
the sacrament, a part of infallible His.

Shushed air, heads bowed in
ordered pews as the tin is passed
to each hand grasping
for a cracker, some juice.
I chew the inside of my cheeks raw,
knowing if they knew,
they'd never let me eat at their table.
So worship drops off my tongue
but it's for
myself, for the temple I am,
how I've built, and fortified.
I gnash my teeth and dare

any of it to spill out
and condemn me;
I smile with my shining canines,
then pierce them into myself,
and tear off another bloody chunk,
more reassurances to fill my gullet.
Hear their echoes
in my cavernous stomach:
Absolve me!

Starving,
I never hold your hand.
Mourning,
I smear the berries on my dead lips,
and on my chest,
I wear flowers.

untitled self portrait
by Leora Mosman



Sermon Notes

by Erin

The first thing you're taught about your body is that its correctness is conditional. They'll make sure you know that your senses can be used for good things, sometimes. You're allowed to trust what comes from the outside, what's bestowed upon you, as long as you're humble about it. Notice nature, it's God's art. Notice food, be thankful for how it nourishes us. Notice music, use it to worship. Notice as you take communion, and acknowledge the grape juice and cracker you consume gingerly and contemplatively. But anything that comes from within you, any feelings or messages of desperation from your body, you must reject those in order to be good. Reject the unease you feel in your chest—that's the enemy—when the youth pastor asks you to "volunteer" yet again. Reject the pit of anxiety in your stomach—that's the enemy—when the boy you're supposed to have a crush on dismisses your opinions and calls you dramatic because he's supposed to. Reject the bad taste left in your mouth—that's the enemy—by the fiery preaching about biblical marriage. Reject the headache of confusion—that's the enemy—from trying to work out how an unconditionally loving God and eternal Hell can both exist. Your body is the enemy. Don't trust it. I cannot be trusted. Made in God's image, but they turned me into Satan with one youth group talk on purity and a symbolic piece of chewed-up gum. They made me paranoid, like my own humanity could be my downfall at any moment. My physicality, this place where my precious soul resides, is dangerous. It leads me down slippery slopes of sin and causes others to stumble. Resist its urges, suppress its needs, hide its shapes in formless clothing, silence its cries for help and for healing. They tell me my body is a temple and

temporary in the same breath. And I don't know whether to worship at its altar or ignore what it asks for because I'll have a new one if I manage to get to heaven.

(eleven years)

Consciously, I've stopped hearing their voices, their preaching/prayers/worship songs, in my head. And I thought the echoes would stop bouncing around inside my body too, but they haven't. It is so frustrating and unfair to keep finding parts of me that they damaged. But I'm trying to learn how to be angry, and more than that, how to be sad. I find myself needing to grieve the lifetime that was lost in which I could have truly known myself through knowing my body. Mourning the alternate universe in which I didn't repress my queerness to protect myself. I am becoming acquainted with my own humanity—with what it's like to value my body not because of its supposed resemblance to God, but for the innate magic in its existence and capability.

I learned from an embodiment coach to not call my body an "it," to use she or he or they instead. And I try sometimes, I get the point, but I think I'm realizing why it's hard. I want my body to just be a tool to me, something I can control and activate and silence at my convenience. That's what I was taught, and honestly, it would be easiest that way. But it—sorry, **she**—is not here to be my subordinate. We are in a deeply relational, dynamic, egalitarian, inextricable partnership. Which means I need to communicate. Mostly, it means I need to listen.

My body asks for a lot of patience from me, which I don't always feel

able to give. I try not to shame myself for that (even though shame is also ingrained in me). I try to give her the same patience I would give a young child, because that's all she really is. She just wants to be listened to. And sometimes her tantrums are happening to protect herself, to protect me, to protect us. I used to shut her away whenever she threw a tantrum, but I'm trying not to do that anymore. I want her to know that even if I don't always love her, I will always make space for her. I will make space for her to be upset, to be angry, to be scared, to be peaceful, to rest, to be joyful, to be authentic, to be free.

This is the promise I'm making to my body: I will always believe you, unconditionally.

colorsplash
by Mary Salmon



wolves

by Jess Rose

wolves that tear at insides finding
worms inside, fleshy fingers ingesting apathy and gnawing
on hunger
feeding off my subtle disease as it boils
beneath the surface.

wolves that tear and rip through skin
in the spaces
between
the spine
and the ridges of rib and bone is where they
bury their noses
carve out their homes.

wolves that tears gather in your eyes for.

wolves of mistake, wolves that want to take me back with them.
wolves wishing there was a time machine.
wolves wishing there was white-out for memory.

wolves that eat my heart out every night
so it grows each day with an ache like
a diamond, to be devoured again when
the sun sets;
another prometheus
who lit a fire where she shouldn't have.

maybe -

i don't need to wear shame like a crown resting on my bleeding brow

the wolves could eat the whole of me and still i'd

be here (you know me, maybe

i hate myself

for existing but i'm too selfish these days

to let go of this body that easy.)

Temple of My Bod
by Bex Machina



Bruised Fruit

by Julianne Bautista

you cry silently instead of counting sheep at night
bewildered and seething with anger
that it happened to you, so
you think to yourself and realize your brain
is filled with poison, like an ongoing
horror film replaying in your mind
he laid you down, pressed cold on your own bed
and thought of you as bruised fruit
with forever scars, sweet and plum
for him to hold
but you aren't his to hold
not one bit

the urging tears that he ignored
the tainted memory on your plain white closet door
that you can hardly look at
and the stained, red blood
on your favorite cardigan sweater
that you no longer ever wear
it's all such an exasperating recollection of
something that should have never happened,
you wish
so you plant your bruised fruit
underneath dewy soil
to help your dead corpse flourish into reincarnation
there's a tree rooted to blossom,
to heal, to embrace, to love
a bruised fruit,
obsolete from your past

Guts

by Autumn Durand

Dear Stomach,

I am sorry. I am not sorry. This cannot be a love letter because the pages are stained with a dozen little resentments that I can't bring myself to ignore, pulling off the page, buzzing in the air around me. I try not to list them, but they spill out anyways: you are too big, scarred, you have been ripped open and stitched back together. You have ceased to work when I needed you to, been loud and imposing, taken up too much space, defined me in ways I never wanted to be defined. But I'm guilty too, my shoulders heavy with blame and, on my worst days, hatred—for making childhood so hard, for being ugly, for the pain and the pain and the pain. For when they cut you open and pulled out your organs, your long, tangled ropes, and sutured and soldered your broken pieces into a chaos which now functions, if with a stutter someday.

I know I have been unkind; I have hurt you. I curl into my resentment, letting it settle over me like a favorite blanket, and make lists of the ways you fail to measure up. All that time spent daydreaming about how I wish you would just disappear, condemning the light pink furrows of your stretch marks, my fingers not brave enough to trace the pale ridge of scar stretched across you. And I have starved you until you cramped up in pain and my hands shook with it, counting calories, head spinning with mental math, dizzy with pride and deprivation on the days I kept you empty. Yet you stay, your scar a resiliency, growing, stretching with me as I oscillate between hatred and adoration, landing somewhere left of neutral. Still, I hold my disapproval close to me, bitterness rolling around on my tongue late at night when I can't sleep and I'm staring at you in the mirror.

it's cruel, but I can't seem to help it, even as I breathe and walk and play with puppies and drink coffee with my friends. Busy hiding you from the sun and under layers of shame I can't seem to shed. Maybe I don't want to. And I'm not grateful, like I know I should be, that I will always have you, and you will always have me. That there is a solidarity and strength in you that 7-year-old Autumn did not understand, and 16-year-old Autumn did not understand, and which 27-year-old Autumn is still trying to, working hard to, understand.

I am sorry. I am not sorry. I will always both love and hate you and most days it will feel like hate. I am weary from all of the times I have had to shove you under desks too small, hide you in clothes I hate, forcing you to shrink into all the spaces where everything, everyone around you makes it perfectly clear how unwelcome you really are. You see, I know something that you don't know. I know that when a fat girl has lipstick on her teeth she is disgusting, when a fat girl wears a dress too tight, she is obscene, horrifying, when a fat girl talks too loud when a fat girl laughs freely when a fat girl eats in public when a fat girl when a fat girl
when a fat girl

when—

I am sorry. I am not sorry. They say loving yourself is a journey, not a destination. But I am tired, and this journey is lonely and some days all I hear is the loud, clanging voices of other people as their insults violently chase me down the street as I walk by, as they whisper behind cupped fingers, their words staining my skin for the rest of the day, the week, the year, like a door slammed in my face. I am sorry that some days I will not, cannot, love you. But you are both enough and too much for me and I am trying to be enough for you.

Always,
Autumn

Your Body is Art
by Amanda Warnock







Suicide Note #1

by Sarah Hoffman

To fall asleep under a whispering poplar
And awake
Consumed by mushrooms

To flow gently over the prairie hills,
Reincarnated as a breeze
An eternal life of being

This Body

by Yuu Ikeda

I don't like this body
that I can't know everything

I don't like this body
that I don't know whose body it is

Every time I look at the mirror,
this unknown body is reflected

Every time I look at the mirror,
I feel that ugliness and empty something
are running around this skin

Whose body is this?
Whose blood is this?
Whose skin is this?

This body tortures me

This stomach, this thighs,
this arms, and this breasts
torture me

Is this body
the punishment for me
from my parents?

Is this pain flowing into me
the punishment for me
from God?

Is this blood burning in me
the punishment for me
who is alive emptily?

medicine

by Jess Rose

“medicine must be flux”
affirmed in the mirror of a girl who may
or may not be dying today
In any of the many ways that death comes to your door.

swollen or sucked dry in the reflections,
the phases
of her body
oppose our mother moon.
the girl, her data points scatter like constellations on the paper
and the doctors
like astronomers
point their telescopes from far away
to carve out shapes they can find a name for.

the stars sing with the voices of little children
and our mother moon cries
for the girl whose orbit pulls the tides above the mountains
and drains the seas dry.
a whole damn universe softly dissected for its own well being
a living autopsy, a misunderstanding, a galaxy
quietly
ripped apart
star
by star.
a chaos helix unraveled from the hem and spun again.

“medicine must be flow”
but she is dying, and has been dying
for a long time
in many of the ways that death comes to your door.
she’s forgotten aliveness, and craves it like the taste of everything
time has taken
but there are some apples she will never taste again
and the poison will ache bittersweet forever.
she thinks it’s all there is.
she’s forgotten that aliveness
tastes like an open sky
and time can never take away
her constellations,
or her light.

how long will you sit on the garden wall
begging dandelions to raise you from the grave? life may not taste
the way it did when you first bit into it but our
mother moon
shines like a halo behind your velvet smile, threadbare
but after everything
still soft
still looking for a reason
to eat.

unhinge your jaws and
swallow this world whole.



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